

Guidelines for School Health Programs to Promote Lifelong Healthy Eating: Summary

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Division of Adolescent and School Health

Establishing healthy eating habits at a young age is critical to proper growth and development; it also makes it more likely that healthy habits will continue into adulthood. Schools are in a good position to help young people improve their eating habits by implementing effective nutrition education, policies, programs, and support services.

Benefits of Healthy Eating

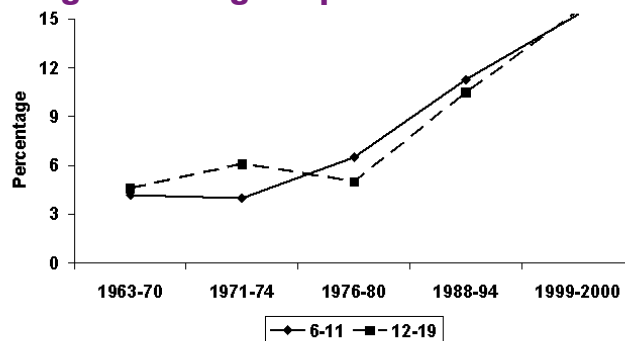
- Helps young people grow, develop, and do well in school.
- Helps prevent childhood and adolescent health problems such as overweight, eating disorders, dental caries, and iron deficiency anemia.
- Helps prevent health problems later in life, including heart disease, cancer, and stroke—the three leading causes of death

Consequences of Unhealthy Eating

Unfortunately, many young people in the United States make poor eating choices that put them at risk for health and social problems.

- Research suggests that not having breakfast can affect children's intellectual performance.^{1,2}
- Poor eating habits and inactivity are the root causes of overweight and obesity. The prevalence of overweight among children ages 6 to 11 has more than doubled in the past 20 years, going from 7% in 1980 to 15% in 2000. Overweight among youth ages 12 to 19 has tripled in the same time period, going from 5% to 15%.³
- Overweight children have a higher rate of low self-esteem, type 2 diabetes, sleep apnea, bone and joint problems, and gall bladder disease.⁴
- It has been estimated that as many as 7 to 8 percent of females in the U.S. suffer from anorexia nervosa and/or bulimia nervosa in their lifetime.⁵

Percentage of Young People Who Are Overweight⁶



Overweight is defined by the age- and sex- specific 95th percentile of body mass index.



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Eating Habits of the Nation's Youth

- Many children and adolescents have a diet too low in fruit and vegetables and too high in saturated fat.⁷

Percent of Children and Adolescents Who Meet U.S. Dietary Guidelines, 1994-96, 1998.⁷

Guideline	6-11 years old		12-19 years old	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Fat	31%	34%	30%	35%
Saturated Fat	25%	25%	28%	34%
Vegetables	18%	19%	33%	26%
Fruits	23%	24%	14%	18%

- Eighty-five percent of adolescent females do not consume enough calcium.⁸
- A large number of high school students use unsafe methods to lose or maintain weight. A nationwide survey found that during the 30 days preceding the survey 13% of students went without eating for one or more days; 6% had vomited or taken laxatives; and 9% had taken diet pills, powders, or liquids without the advice of their physicians.⁹

The Opportunity

Schools are ideally suited to give children and adolescents the skills and support they need to adopt healthy eating behaviors for life.

- More than 95% of all children and adolescents ages 5–17 are enrolled in school.
- Schools can develop and implement comprehensive nutrition policies that reflect a coordinated approach to school health.
- School-based nutrition education can help students acquire skills, attitudes, and knowledge supportive of healthy eating.
- Schools can reinforce positive eating habits and offer many opportunities for young people to practice healthy eating.

CDC's Guidelines for Schools to Promote Lifelong Healthy Eating

In collaboration with experts from universities, state and federal agencies, voluntary organizations, and professional associations, CDC has developed guidelines to help schools implement effective nutrition policies and educational programs. Guidelines for School Health Programs to Promote Lifelong Healthy Eating is based on an extensive review of research and practice.

Key Principles

The CDC guidelines state that school-based nutrition education programs are most likely to be effective when they:

- Help young people learn skills (not just facts).
- Give students repeated chances to practice healthy eating.
- Make nutrition education activities fun and participatory
- Involve teachers, administrators, families, community leaders, and students in delivering strong, consistent messages about healthy eating as part of a coordinated school health program.
- Are part of a coordinated nutrition policy.

Recommendations

The guidelines include seven recommendations for ensuring a quality school program to promote lifelong healthy eating.

1 Policy

Seek input from all members of the school community to develop a coordinated school nutrition policy that promotes healthy eating through classroom lessons and a supportive school environment. The policy should commit the school to:

- Provide adequate time for nutrition education.
- Offer healthy, appealing foods (such as fruits, vegetables, and low-fat grain products) wherever food is available and discourage the availability of foods high in fat, sodium, and added sugars (such as

What is healthy eating?

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, produced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, gives the following advice:

- Eat a variety of foods.
- Balance the food you eat with physical activity.
- Eat plenty of grain products, vegetables, and fruits.
- Choose a diet that is low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol and moderate in sugars, salt, and sodium.

soda, candy, and fried chips) on school grounds and as part of fund-raising activities.

- Discourage teachers from using food to discipline or reward students.
- Provide adequate time and space for students to eat meals in a pleasant, safe environment.
- Establish links with professionals who can provide counseling for nutritional problems, refer families to nutrition services, and plan health promotion activities for staff.

2 Curriculum

As part of a sequential, comprehensive health education curriculum that begins in preschool and continues through secondary school, implement nutrition education designed to help students adopt healthy eating behaviors. Such education should:

- Help students learn specific nutrition-related skills, such as how to plan a healthy meal and compare food labels.
- Ensure that students also learn general health skills, such as how to assess their health habits, set goals for improvement, and resist social pressures to make unhealthy eating choices.

3 Instruction

Provide nutrition education through activities that are fun, participatory, developmentally appropriate, and culturally relevant. These activities should:

- Emphasize the positive, appealing aspects of healthy eating rather than the harmful effects of unhealthy eating.
- Present the benefits of healthy eating in the context of what is already important to students.
- Give students many opportunities to taste foods that are low in fat, sodium, and added sugars, and high in vitamins, minerals, and fiber.



4 Program Coordination

Coordinate school food service with nutrition education and with other components of the school health program to reinforce messages about healthy eating.

5 Staff Training

Provide staff who are involved in nutrition education with adequate pre-service and ongoing in-service training that focuses on teaching strategies for promoting healthy eating habits.

6 Family & Community Involvement

Involve family members and the community in supporting and reinforcing nutrition education.

7 Evaluation

Regularly evaluate the program's effectiveness in promoting healthy eating and make changes as appropriate.

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